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POEMS BY KATHARINE TYNAN

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TWENTY ONE POEMS BY KATHARINE TYNAN SELECTED BY W. B. YEATS

DUN EMER PRESS
LIMITED EDITION
MCMVII

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SHEEP AND LAMBS

All in the April evening,
April airs were abroad;
The sheep with their little lambs
Passed me by on the road.

The sheep with their little lambs
Passed me by on the road;
All in the April evening
I thought on the Lamb of God.

The lambs were weary and crying
With a weak, human cry.
I thought on the Lamb of God
Going meekly to die.

Up in the blue, blue mountains
Dewy pastures are sweet;
Rest for the little bodies,
Rest for the little feet.

But for the Lamb of God,
Up on the hill-top green,
Only a Cross of shame
Two stark crosses between.

All in the April evening,
April airs were abroad;
I saw the sheep with their lambs,
And thought on the Lamb of God.

MATER DEI

She looked to east, she looked to west,
Her eyes, unfathomable, mild,
That saw both worlds, came home to rest,—
Home to her own sweet child.
God's golden head was at her breast.

What need to look o'er land and sea?
What could the winged ships bring to her?
What gold or gems of price might be,
Ivory or miniver,
Since God Himself lay on her knee?

What could th' intense blue heaven keep
To draw her eyes and thoughts so high?
All heaven was where her Boy did leap,
Where her foot quietly
Went rocking the dear God asleep.

The angel folk fared up and down
A Jacob's Ladder hung between

Her quiet chamber and God's Town.
She saw unawed, serene;
Since God Himself played by her gown.

LAMBS

He sleeps as a lamb sleeps,
Beside his mother.
Somewhere in yon blue deeps
His tender brother
Sleeps like a lamb and leaps.

He feeds as a lamb might,
Beside his mother.
Somewhere in fields of light
A lamb, his brother,
Feeds, and is clothed in white.

OLD SONG RE-SUNG

I saw three ships a-sailing,
A-sailing on the sea,
The first her masts were silver,
Her hull was ivory.
The snows came drifting softly,
And lined her white as wool;
Oh, Jesus, Son of Mary,
Thy Cradle beautiful!

I saw three ships a-sailing,
The next was red as blood,
Her decks shone like a ruby,
Encrimsoned all her wood.
Her main-mast stood up lonely,
A lonely Cross and stark.
Oh, Jesus, Son of Mary,
Bring all men to that ark!

I saw three ships a-sailing.
The third for cargo bore
The souls of men redeemed,
That shall be slaves no more.
The lost beloved faces,
I saw them glad and free.
Oh, Jesus, Son of Mary,
When wilt thou come for me?

EASTER

Bring flowers to strew His way,
Yea, sing, make holiday;
Bid young lambs leap,
And earth laugh after sleep.

For now He cometh forth
Winter flies to the north,

Folds wings and cries
Amid the bergs and ice.

Yea, Death, great Death is dead,
And Life reigns in his stead;
Cometh the Athlete
New from dead Death's defeat.

Cometh the Wrestler,
But Death he makes no stir,
Utterly spent and done,
And all his kingdom gone.

THE WEEPING BABE

She kneels by the cradle
Where Jesus doth lie;
Singing, Lullaby, my Baby!
But why dost Thou cry?

The babes of the village
Smile sweetly in sleep;
And lullaby, my Baby,
That ever dost weep!

I've wrapped Thee in linen,
The gift of the Kings;

And wool, soft and fleecy,
The kind Shepherd brings.

Now smile, little Jesus,
Whom naught can defile;
All gifts will I give Thee
An thou wilt but smile.

But it's lullaby, my Baby!
And mournful am I,
Thou cherished little Jesus,
That still Thou wilt cry.

'ADVENIAT REGNUM TUUM'

Thy kingdom come! Yea, bid it come!
But when Thy kingdom first began
On earth, Thy kingdom was a home,
A child, a woman, and a man.

The child was in the midst thereof,
O, blessed Jesus, holiest One!
The centre and the fount of love
Mary and Joseph's little Son.

Wherever on the earth shall be
A child, a woman, and a man,

Imaging that sweet trinity
Wherewith Thy kingdom first began,

Establish there Thy kingdom! Yea,
And o'er that trinity of love
Send down, as in Thy appointed day,
The brooding spirit of Thy Dove!

THE LEGEND OF ST. AUSTIN AND THE CHILD

St. Austin, going in thought
Along the sea-sands gray,
Into another world was caught,
And Carthage far away.

He saw the City of God
Hang in the saffron sky;
And this was holy ground he trod,
Where mortals come not nigh.

He saw pale spires aglow,
Houses of heavenly sheen;
All in a world of rose and snow,
A sea of gold and green.

There amid Paradise
The saint was rapt away
From unillumined sands and skies
And floor of muddy clay.

His soul took wings and flew,
Forgetting mortal stain,
Upon the track of that bright crew
That homed to heaven again.

Forgetting mortal dearth
It seized on heavenly things,
Till it was cast again to earth,
Because it had not wings.

Because the Three in One
He could not understand,
Baffled and beaten and undone,
He gazed o'er sea and land.

Then by a little pool
A lovely child he saw;
A harmless thing and beautiful,
And yet so full of awe,

That with a curved sea-shell,
Held in his rosy hand,
Had scooped himself a little well
Within the yielding sand.

And to and fro went he,
Between it and the wave,
Bearing his shell filled with the sea
To find a sandy grave.

'What is it that you do,
You lovely boy and bold?'
'I empty out the ocean blue,
You man so wise and old!

'See you how in this cup
I bind the great sea's girth!'
'Ah no, the gray sands suck it up
Your cup is little worth.

'Now put your play aside,
And let the ocean be.
Tell me your name, O violet-eyed,
That empty out the sea!

'What lineage high and fine
Is yours, O kingly boy,

That sure art sprung of royal line,
A people's hope and joy.'

'Austin, as you have said,
A crown my Sire doth wear,
My mother was a royal maid
And yet went cold and bare.'

He shook his golden curls,
A scornful laugh laughed he:
'The night that I was born, the churls,
They would not shelter me.

'Only the ox and ass,
The night that I was born,
Made me a cradle of the grass
And watched by me till morn.

'The night that I was born
The ass and ox alone,
Betwixt the midnight and the morn,
Knelt down upon the stone.

'The bitter night I came,
Each star sang in its sphere.
Now riddle, riddle me my name,
My Austin, tried and dear.'

Austin is on his face,
Before that vision bright.
'My Lord, what dost Thou in this place
With such a sinful wight?'

'I come not here in wrath,
But I come here in love,
My Austin, skilled in life and death,
Thy vanity to prove.

'Mortal, yet over-bold
To fly where th' eagle flies,
As soon this cup the sea will hold
As thou My Mysteries.

'Patience a little yet,
And thou shalt be with Me,
And in thy soul's small cup unmeet
Myself will pour the sea.'

When Austin raised his head
No child was there beside,
But in the cup the Child had made
There swelled the rising tide.

IMMORTALITY

So I have sunk my roots in earth
Since that my pretty boys had birth;
And fear no more the grave and gloom,
I, with the centuries to come.

As the tree blossoms so bloom I,
Flinging wild branches to the sky;
Renew each year my leafy suit,
Strike with the years a deeper root.

Shelter a thousand birds to be,
A thousand herds give praise to me;
And in my kind and grateful shade
How many a weary head be laid.

I clothe myself without a stain.
In me a child is born again,
A child that looks with innocent eyes
On a new world with glad surprise.

The old mistakes are all undone,
All the old sins are purged and gone.
Old wounds and scars have left no trace,
There are no lines in this young face.

To hear the cuckoo the first time,
And 'mid new roses in the prime
To read the poets newly. This,
Year after year, shall be my bliss.

Of me shall love be born anew;
I shall be loved and lover too;
Years after this poor body has died
Shall be the bridegroom and the bride.

Of me shall mothers spring to know
The mother's bliss, the mother's woe;
And children's children yet to be
Shall learn their prayers about my knee.

And many million lights of home
Shall light for me the time to come.
Unto me much shall be forgiven,
I that make many souls for heaven.

THE ONLY CHILD

Lest he miss other children, lo!
His angel is his playfellow.
A riotous angel two years old,
With wings of rose and curls of gold.

There on the nursery floor together
They play when it is rainy weather,
Building brick castles with much pain,
Only to knock them down again.

Two golden heads together look
An hour long o'er a picture-book,
Or, tired of being good and still,
They play at horses with good will.

And when the boy laughs you shall hear
Another laughter silver-clear,
Sweeter than music of the skies,
Or harps, or birds of Paradise.

Two golden heads one pillow press,
Two rosebuds shut for heaviness.
The wings of one are round the other
Lest chill befall his tender brother.

All day, with forethought mild and grave,
The little angel's quick to save.
And still outruns with tender haste
The adventurous feet that go too fast.

From draughts, from fire, from cold and stings
Wraps him within his gauzy wings;
And knows his father's pride, and shares
His happy mother's tears and prayers.

THE NURSE

Such innocent companionship
Is hers, whether she wake or sleep,
'Tis scarcely strange her face should wear
The young child's grave and innocent air.

All the night long she hath by her
The quiet breathing, the soft stir,
Nor knows how in that tender place
The children's angels veil the face.

She wakes at dawn with bird and child
To earth new-washed and reconciled,
The hour of silence and of dew,
When God hath made His world anew.

She sleeps at eve, about the hour
Of bedtime for the bird and flower,
When daisies, evening primroses,
Know that the hour of closing is.

Her daylight thoughts are all on toys
And games for darling girls and boys,
Lest they should fret, lest they should weep,
Strayed from their heavenly fellowship.

She is as pretty and as brown
As the wood's children far from town,
As bright-eyed, glancing, shy of men,
As any squirrel, any wren.

Tender she is to beast and bird,
As in her breast some memory stirred
Of days when those were kin of hers
Who go in feathers and in furs.

A child, yet is the children's law,
And rules by love and rules by awe.
And, stern at times, is kind withal
As a girl-baby with her doll.

Outside the nursery door there lies
The world with all its griefs and sighs,
Its needs, its sins, its stains of sense:
Within is only innocence.

OF ST. FRANCIS AND THE ASS

Our father, ere he went
Out with his brother, Death,
Smiling and well-content
As a bridegroom goeth,
Sweetly forgiveness prayed
From man or beast whom he
Had ever injurèd
Or burdened needlessly.

'Verily,' then said he,
'I crave before I pass
Forgiveness full and free
Of my little brother, the ass.
Many a time and oft,
When winds and ways were hot,
He hath borne me cool and soft
And service grudged me not.

'And once did it betide
There was, unseen of me,
A gall upon his side
That suffered grievously.
And once his manger was
Empty and bare, and brown.
(Praise God for sweet, dry grass
That Bethlehem folk shook down!)

'Consider, brethern,' said he,
'Our little brother; how mild,
How patient, he will be,
Though men are fierce and wild.
His coat is gray and fine,
His eyes are kind with love;
This little brother of mine
Is gentle as the dove.

'Consider how such an one
Beheld our Saviour born,
And carried him, full-grown,
Through Eastern streets one morn.
For this the Cross is laid
Upon him for a sign.
Greatly is honoured
This little brother of mine.'

And even while he spake,
Down in his stable stall
His little ass 'gan shake
And turned its face to the wall.
Down fell the heavy tear;
Its gaze so mournful was,
Fra Leo, standing near,
Pitied the little ass.

That night our father died,
All night the kine did low:
The ass went heavy-eyed,
With patient tears and slow.
The very birds on wings
Made mournful cries in the air.
Amen! all living things
Our father's brethern were.

ST FRANCIS TO THE BIRDS

Little sisters, the birds:
We must praise God, you and I—
You, with songs that fill the sky,
I, with halting words.

All things tell His praise,
Woods and waters thereof sing,
Summer, Winter, Autumn, Spring,
And the night and days.

Yea, and cold and heat,
And the sun and stars and moon,
Sea with her monotonous tune,
Rain and hail and sleet,

And the winds of heaven,
And the solemn hills of blue,
And the brown earth and the dew,
And the thunder even,

And the flowers' sweet breath.
All things make one glorious voice;
Life with fleeting pains and joys,
And our brother, Death.

Little flowers of air,
With your feathers soft and sleek,
And your bright brown eyes and meek,
He hath made you fair.

He hath taught to you
Skill to weave in tree and thatch
Nests where happy mothers hatch
Speckled eggs of blue.

And hath children given:
When the soft heads overbrim
The brown nests, then thank ye Him
In the clouds of heaven.

Also in your lives
Live His laws Who loveth you.

Husbands, be ye kind and true;
Be home-keeping, wives:

Love not gossiping;
Stay at home and keep the nest;
Fly not here and there in quest
Of the newest thing.

Live as brethren live:
Love be in each heart and mouth;
Be not envious, be not wroth,
Be not slow to give.

When ye build the nest,
Quarrel not o'er straw or wool;
He who hath be bountiful
To the neediest.

Be not puffed nor vain
Of your beauty or your worth,
Of your children or your birth,
Or the praise ye gain.

Eat not greedily:
Sometimes for sweet mercy's sake,
Worm or insect spare to take;
Let it crawl or fly.

See ye sing not near
To our church on holy day,
Lest the human-folk should stray
From their prayers to hear.

Now depart in peace:
In God's name I bless each one;
May your days be long i' the sun
And your joys increase.

And remember me,
Your poor brother Francis, who
Loves you and gives thanks to you
For this courtesy.

Sometimes when ye sing,
Name my name, that He may take
Pity for the dear song's sake
On my shortcoming.

THE CHILDREN OF LIR

Out upon the sand-dunes thrive the coarse long grasses;
Herons standing knee-deep in the brackish pool;
Overhead the sunset fire and flame amasses
And the moon to eastward rises pale and cool.
Rose and green around her, silver-gray and pearly,

Chequered with the black rooks flying home to bed;
For, to wake at daybreak, birds must couch them early:
And the day's a long one since the dawn was red.

On the chilly lakelet, in that pleasant gloaming,
See the sad swans sailing: they shall have no rest:
Never a voice to greet them save the bittern's booming
Where the ghostly sallows sway against the West.
'Sister,' saith the gray swan, 'Sister, I am weary,'
Turning to the white swan wet, despairing eyes;
'O' she saith, 'my young one! O' she saith, 'my dearie!'
Casts her wings about him with a storm of cries.

Woe for Lir's sweet children whom their vile stepmother
Glamoured with her witch-spells for a thousand years;
Died their father raving, on his throne another,
Blind before the end came from the burning tears.
Long the swans have wandered over lake and river;
Gone is all the glory of the race of Lir:
Gone and long forgotten like a dream of fever:
But the swans remember the sweet days that were.

Hugh, the black and white swan with the beauteous feathers,
Fiachra, the black swan with the emerald breast,
Conn, the youngest, dearest, sheltered in all weathers,
Him his snow-white sister loves the tenderest.
These her mother gave her as she lay a-dying;

To her faithful keeping; faithful hath she been,
With her wings spread o'er them when the tempest's crying,
And her songs so hopeful when the sky's serene.

Other swans have nests made 'mid the reeds and rushes,
Lined with downy feathers where the cygnets sleep
Dreaming, if a bird dreams, till the daylight blushes,
Then they sail out swiftly on the current deep.
With the proud swan-father, tall, and strong, and stately,
And the mild swan-mother, grave with household cares,
All well-born and comely, all rejoicing greatly:
Full of honest pleasure is a life like theirs.

But alas! for my swans with the human nature,
Sick with human longings, starved for human ties,
With their hearts all human cramped to a bird's stature,
And the human weeping in the bird's soft eyes.
Never shall my swans build nests in some green river,
Never fly to Southward in the autumn gray,
Rear no tender children, love no mates for ever;
Robbed alike of bird's joys and of man's are they.

Babbles Conn the youngest, 'Sister, I remember
At my father's palace how I went in silk,
Ate the juicy deer-flesh roasted from the ember,
Drank from golden goblets my child's draught of milk.

Once I rode a-hunting, laughed to see the hurly,
Shouted at the ball-play, on the lake did row;
You had for your beauty gauds that shone so rarely.'
'Peace' saith Fionnuala, 'that was long ago.'

'Sister,' saith Fiachra, 'well do I remember
How the flaming torches lit the banquet-hall,
And the fire leapt skyward in the mid-December,
And among the rushes slept our staghounds tall.
By our father's right hand you sat shyly gazing,
Smiling half and sighing, with your eyes a-glow,
As the bards sang loudly all your beauty praising.'
'Peace,' saith Fionnuala, 'that was long ago.'

'Sister,' then saith Hugh 'most do I remember
One I called my brother, one, earth's goodliest man,
Strong as forest oaks are where the wild vines clamber,
First at feast or hunting, in the battle's van.
Angus, you were handsome, wise, and true, and tender,
Loved by every comrade, feared by every foe:
Low, low, lies your beauty, all forgot your splendour.'
'Peace,' saith Fionnuala, 'that was long ago.'

Dews are in the clear air and the roselight paling;
Over sands and sedges shines the evening star;

And the moon's disc lonely high in heaven is sailing;
Silvered all the spear-heads of the rushes are.
Housèd warm are all things as the night grows colder,
Water-fowl and sky-fowl dreamless in the nest;
But the swans go drifting, drooping wing and shoulder
Cleaving the still water where the fishes rest.

THE BIRDS' BARGAIN

'O spare my cherries in the net,'
Brother Benignus prayed; 'and I
Summer and winter, shine and wet,
Will pile the blackbirds' table high.'

'O spare my youngling peas,' he prayed,
'That for the Abbot's table be;
And every blackbird shall be fed;
Yea, they shall have their fill,' said he.

His prayer, his vow, the blackbirds heard,
And spared his shining garden-plot.
In abstinence went every bird,
All the old thieving ways forgot.

He kept his promise to his friends,
And daily set them finest fare

Of corn and meal and manchet-ends,
With marrowy bones for winter bare.

Brother Benignus died in grace:
The brethren keep his trust, and feed
The blackbirds in this pleasant place,
Purged, as dear heaven, from strife and greed.

The blackbirds sing the whole year long,
Here where they keep their promise given,
And do the mellowing fruit no wrong.
Brother Benignus smiles in heaven.

A GARDENER-SAGE

Here in the garden-bed,
Hoeing the celery,
Wonders the Lord has made
Pass ever before me.
I see the young birds build,
And swallows come and go,
And summer grow and gild,
And winter die in snow.

Many a thing I note,
And store it in my mind,

For all my ragged coat
That scarce will stop the wind.
I light my pipe and draw,
And, leaning on my spade,
I marvel with much awe
O'er all the Lord hath made.

Now, here's a curious thing:
Upon the first of March
The crow goes house-building
In the elm and in the larch.
And be it shine or snow,
Though many winds carouse,
That day the artful crow
Begins to build his house.

But then — the wonder's big!
If Sunday fell that day,
Nor straw, nor scraw, nor twig,
Till Monday would he lay.
His black wings to his side,
He'd drone upon his perch,
Subdued and holy-eyed
As though he were in church.

The crow's a gentleman
Not greatly to my mind,
He'll steal what seeds he can,
And all you hide he'll find.
Yet though he's bully and sneak,
To small birds, bird of prey,
He counts the days of the week,
And keeps the Sabbath Day.

NYMPHS

Where are ye now, O beautiful girls of the mountain,
Oreads all?
Nothing at all stirs here save the drip of the fountain;
Answers our call
Only the heart-glad thrush, in the Vale of Thrushes;
Stirs in the brake
But the dew-bright ear of the hare in his couch of rushes
Listening, awake.

BLESSINGS

God bless the little orchard brown
Where the sap stirs these quickening days.
Soon in a white and rosy gown
The trees will give great praise.

God knows I have it in my mind,
The white house with the golden eaves.
God knows since it is left behind
That something grieves and grieves.

God keep the small house in his care,
The garden bordered all in box,
Where primulas and wallflowers are
And crocuses in flocks.

God keep the little rooms that ope
One to another, swathed in green,
Where honeysuckle lifts her cup
With jessamine between.

God bless the quiet old grey head
That dreams beside the fire of me,
And makes home there for me indeed
Over the Irish Sea.

THE DOVES

The house where I was born,
Where I was young and gay,
Grows old amid its corn,
Amid its scented hay.

Moan of the cushat dove,
In silence rich and deep;
The old head I love
Nods to its quiet sleep.

Where once were nine and ten
Now two keep house together;
The doves moan and complain
All day in the still weather.

What wind, bitter and great,
Has swept the country's face,
Altered, made desolate
The heart-remembered place?

What wind, bitter and wild,
Has swept the towering trees
Beneath whose shade a child
Long since gathered heartease?

Under the golden eaves
The house is still and sad,
As though it grieves and grieves
For many a lass and lad.

The cushat doves complain
All day in the still weather;
Where once were nine or ten
But two keep house together.

SLOW SPRING

O year, grow slowly. Exquisite, holy,
The days go on
With almonds showing the pink stars blowing,
And birds in the dawn.

Grow slowly, year, like a child that is dear,
Or a lamb that is mild,
By little steps, and by little skips,
Like a lamb or a child.

THE FOGGY DEW

A splendid place is London, with golden store,
For them that have the heart and hope and youth galore;
But mournful are its streets to me, I tell you true,
For I'm longing sore for Ireland in the foggy dew.

The sun he shines all day here, so fierce and fine,
With never a wisp of mist at all to dim his shine;
The sun he shines all day here from skies of blue:
He hides his face in Ireland in the foggy dew.

The maids go out to milking in the pastures gray,
The sky is green and golden at dawn of the day;
And in the deep-drenched meadows the hay lies new,
And the corn is turning yellow in the foggy dew.

Mavrone! if I might feel now the dew on my face,
And the wind from the mountains in that remembered place,
I'd give the wealth of London, if mine it were to do,
And I'd travel home to Ireland and the foggy dew.

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